Niagara Is Dwarfed by Grand Coulee Spillway

SLOWLY, but surely, the mass of concrete rose above the swift-moving waters of the Columbia; at first 50-foot low gaps in the concrete, numbering 15, carried the natural flow of the river. As the dam reached its completed stage, with a total of 10,250,000 cubic yards of concrete used, the low gaps were closed and the water held in check to form one of the largest artificial lakes ever created by the hand of man. The spillway section is 1,650 feet in length in the center of the dam. Excess water is allowed to course over the spillway, forming a falls twice as high as that of the famed Niagara. Eleven drum gates at the crest of the spillway, each 28 feet high and 135 feet long, control the water held in storage. At the conclusion of the project, more concrete had been poured in the Coulee Dam than the total poured by the Bureau of Reclamation to that date. This amount includes the recently completed Boulder Dam. The lake formed by the Grand Coulee Dam extends 151 miles up river, to the Canadian boundary. It is navigable and, undoubtedly, will become one of the resort spots of North America in the years to come. The body of water follows the natural course of the Columbia through its rocky channel, formed thousands of years ago before glaciers moving southward over the lava flows caused the river to leave its course and eroded the majestic cliffs of the Grand Coulee. Storage in the lake will amount to 10,000,000 acre-feet. The elevation of the water will be 1,290 feet above sea level.

Was Mammoth Undertaking

As the several lava flows covering the region of the Coulee pressed northward and westward, they changed the course of the river to the south of the Colville Valley to Pasco. So, the river was forced to detour to the west, where it met the foothills of the Cascade Range, as well as the Okanogan Highlands. In this manner was formed the region today known as the Big Bend in the "hollow" of the Columbia River.

It was the irrigation of this district which prompted the dream of a productive Columbia Basin more than a quarter of a century ago. Men vitally interested in the growth of the west, and who visualized the productive possibilities of the arid land thirsting for water, first formulated plans for bringing irrigation to the basin. So strong was their belief in the future of the area that they interested other progressive citizens in the project, and a total of $100,000 was raised and expended toward the furtherance of the idea. The winter of 1933-34 saw the dream realized as work was started on the Grand Coulee Dam, which embraces the greatest reclamation project ever conceived in the mind of man.